Substance of Linguistic Provinces Demand

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(FOUNDED BY MAHATMA GANDHI)
Editor: MAGANBHAI P. DESAI

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NOTES

Science and Suicide

"A Research worker who committed suicide at Britain's Microbiological (Germ Warfare) Research Establishment at Porton was stated to get 'frightfully depressed' over his work when evidence was given at the inquest last week.

"The dead man, a senior scientific officer, was an extremely experienced chemist. He had committed suicide by taking cyanide.

"Asked by the Coroner whether the deceased had bouts of drinking, his wife said: 'Yes, he got frightfully depressed and he felt it was the materials he was working with which caused this depression. Then he drank to relieve the depression.'" (From *Peace News*, London, 14-8-'53).

So neither science nor drink could help this man out of the depression. They rather helped his way to death only. Such incidents show that science is not enough; God and religion fulfil, do not negate, science.

16-10-'53 M. P.

The Khan Brothers

Lahore, Oct. 19. Dr Khan Sahib, Frontier's former Chief Minister, now interned in Abbotabad, said recently that he, like many other detenus in the province, was denied an opportunity to serve the country on the "false plea that we are enemies of the State".

He was answering questions in his first press interview since his detention over five years ago to a columnist of the local daily *Imroze*. (Today)

Dr Khan Sahib said, it was wrong to presume that he and his former colleagues were hankering for offices. "The fact of the matter is that we can help the Government a lot without any expectation of a return."

He criticized the Government for enlisting the aid of foreigners particularly British experts in framing a constitution for the country. Dr Khan Sahib was not against basing the Pakistan constitution on Islamic principles, which, according to him, constituted the highest form of socialism. "But the difficulty is," he said, "that a large section of our people — modern or conservative — do not fully understand Islam."

On the issue of a national language for the country, he said: "The controversy is ridiculous. Whatever the language, may be even English, the real aim is education. Basic education can best be imparted in regional languages."

He considered it unfortunate that some people were raising these controversies for selfish ends and spreading dissension among the people....

Dr Khan Sahib declared that the Prime Minister, Mr Mohammed Ali deserved all support from the people. "He is enthusiastic, hardworking and young. May he succeed in his mission." — P. T. I.

(From *The Hindustan Times*, October 20, '53)

It is so good to hear again, after a long period of five years, the voice of freedom and peace that the brave Khan Brothers possess. But it is really tragic that it has been still kept hushed by a Pakistani fiat of detention of the two Khan Brothers. Let us hope the Prime Minister, Shri Mohammed Ali sees his way to set these brave and patriotic detenus free at the very time when they are most needed in the counsels of Pakistan affairs and its constitution-making.

24-10-'53 M. P.

A "Pocket of Unemployment"

Meghappa, a weaver of Ravebennur, was sentenced to transportation for life by the Additional Sessions Judge of Dharwar on the charge of murdering his two-year-old son, and to 7 years' imprisonment for attempt to murder his six-year-old son. He threw his two sons into a well, it was said, as his and his wife's income was insufficient to maintain the family. The older boy was rescued but the younger one was drowned. The Judge recommended reduction in the sentence, as it was a case where "great poverty and utter distress" had caused the crime. (*Evening News of India*, October 7, '53, p. 8).

Rome is certainly on fire, but what are the Neros doing?

V. G. D.

[Obviously the man is punished as a murderer. The ruthless logic of law can have no other classification for the man. But was he a murderer in the sense in which the penal code might have desired the punishment? Surely the father did not *murder* the child, as it is commonly understood.

Therefore, should not the judiciary in its discretion, see that the case deserved differential treatment at its hand? The bread-earner is to be removed from the poor family, resulting in further misery for the poor woman and her unfortunate surviving child. Is it just? Is it mercy? It would be good if Government sees its way to lessen the severity of law that poor Meghappa technically called upon his miserable head.

15-10-'53 M. P.]

THE LANGUAGE OF THE CAPITALIST "PRODUCER" (INVESTOR)

(*By M. P. T. Acharya*)

A correspondent writes: The business community does not ask for any preferential treatment for itself beyond asking for a juster appreciation of its problems and complains that frank exposition of official policy is not always followed up by appropriate action.

What they call juster appreciation of their problems is only to accept their privileged position and to do what is needful to keep their privileges unimpaired.

This privileged minority has managed to put in 10,692 crores of rupees in textile factories. They did it themselves, because they knew they could mint money by doing so. They had the privilege of investing so much money — others could not bring up so much money. So they think they can hold others by ransom — both wage-labour and consumers — and they are doing it, although they want the Government also to enrich the coffers of the "industry" (i.e. industrialists) so that textiles may be supplied to others at high prices.

They claim they are giving bread to 7,43,000 workers and cultivators of 11,32,000 bales of cotton and therefore deserve help. But they have not opened the factories to help these workers and cotton cultivators, when they make profits also out of them. But they think they are only doing a service to them to be rewarded. They are worried that since the advent of freedom, they have to *bear* Rs 54 crores of levies and new taxes. They are worried that the poor consumer has to pay the enhanced prices. But they also consider that the wage bills are heavy. In spite of all these "cost inflation" factors, they are making profits!

The millowners and their "correspondents" wrote of the "reluctance" of the public to buy their cloth owing to which there is a heavy carry-over of the stocks. In their aggressive language, they want to "wear down" this consumers' reluctance by reducing costs, chiefly of course by making workers accept lower wages or the government "help" i.e. compulsion. Then they will be able to sell *perhaps* cloth cheaper to workers and consumers.

Two complaints — only two of the many: — That the Government has not encouraged the increase of "reserves of the industry for expediting the programme of plant restoration" and that labourers oppose "rationalization" (i.e. increased production methods by putting more looms or spindles per man for the same wages as before) have aggravated the "rehabilitation problem".

Another complaint is that since 1950 there has been a steep fall in the export of Indian cotton goods. It was scarcely 600 million yards in 1952 of course. They point out with the authority of the I. L. O. report that it is a post-war phenomenon. Hence the Government must find foreign markets, i.e. make foreign countries accept Indian goods, although in India we don't want foreign goods. Since that cannot be arranged, the textile magnates want Indian Government to imitate West Germany, Italy and Holland where exports are subsidized with Government revenues, which means by taxing Indians — "generous export subsidies and incentives" — robbing Peter to pay Paul.

But there have been complaints from abroad that Indian exporters dispatched such shabby goods that even Indian merchants have abandoned their imports from India. That is nowhere in their complaints — or plaints.

Their way is to sell cheaper abroad at Government and Indian people's cost with profits to themselves. In that case, they need not sell in India at all. All losses to Government and people, all profits to themselves.

CEILINGS ON LAND

(*By S. N. Agarwal*)

The Five-Year Plan has made it quite clear that one of the basic principles of India's land policy ought to be that "there should be an absolute limit to the amount of land which any individual may hold". This limit or ceiling on land holdings will, naturally, have to be fixed by each State in accordance with its own agrarian history and present circumstances. The Planning Commission has, therefore, set up a Central Land Reforms Committee to assist various States in the collection of the requisite land data for the fixation of ceilings on existing land holdings. The Planning Commission has also divided large individual holdings into two categories: Those which are so efficiently managed that their break-up would result in fall in production and those which do not meet the required standards. For the latter category, the Commission recommends that Land Management legislation should be undertaken by different State Governments as early as possible.

The A. I. C. C. session at Agra also resolved that "the pace of progress must be quickened more specially in regard to land reform". The Committee attached the greatest importance "to the introduction of far-reaching land reforms in India". "While progress has been made in this direction by several State Governments, much yet remains to be done in order to make the actual tillers of the soil the owners of land." The A. I. C. C., therefore, called upon all State Governments "to take *immediate* steps in regard to the collection of the requisite land data and the fixation of ceilings on land holdings with a view to distribute the land, as far as possible, among landless workers".

We are, therefore, sorry to find that the recent Conference of Ministers for Agriculture struck a discordant note and did not create the proper atmosphere for the implementation of

land policy as enunciated in the National Plan and the Agra resolution of the A.I.C.C. We are surprised to observe that the Union Minister for Agriculture, Dr Punjabrao Deshmukh, openly opposed the basic principle of fixing ceilings on existing land holdings and observed that such a policy of interference with rural life would "recoil upon us". He, therefore, advocated that the policy of putting a ceiling on present holding should be "abandoned". Instead of impressing on various States the desirability of going ahead with the collection of land data with a view to fix ceilings, he expressed satisfaction at the fact that only two or three States were intending to put a ceiling on land holdings.

Dr P. S. Deshmukh is, of course, entitled to hold his own views in this matter. But these must be regarded as his personal opinions and not the view of the Planning Commission or the Government of India or the Congress. It was, thus, not possible for the Agriculture Ministers' Conference to arrive at any conclusions contrary to the decisions of the Planning Commission and the All India Congress Committee. They rightly left the question into the hands of the National Development Council which met in New Delhi in the first week of October.

The detailed proceedings of the Development Council have not been released to the Press and we do not know whether the Council had enough time to devote to the careful consideration of the problems of land reforms. We have, however, no doubt in our mind that the Government of India, as well as the State Governments, would continue to give the highest priority to the introduction of far-reaching land reforms in India, particularly relating to the distribution of land among the landless tillers of the soil. It is quite obvious that sufficient land cannot be made available for redistribution unless a ceiling is placed on the existing land holdings. It is no use satisfying ourselves by merely fixing a limit on future acquisition or resumption. It will be hardly proper to put a ceiling on future transfers without touching the existing large farms running into hundreds or even thousands of acres.

We do not mean, however, that uniform ceilings should be fixed in all the States for all qualities of land. The ceilings will surely differ with different regions and categories of soil. We are also not pleading for a very low ceiling to begin with. It will not be proper to be very strict only with landowners while glaring inequalities continue to exist in the other social and economic sectors of our national life. We do not mind if the ceilings are fixed a bit liberally in the initial stages. But to try to avoid the fixation of any ceilings on existing holdings is highly unfair. What justification is there for landowners to still continue to possess hundreds of acres while there are 4.5 million landless agricultural labourers in our country? Land is a gift of Nature and can neither be increased nor decreased by man. The problem of economic inequalities must, therefore, be tackled on the land front in the very beginning. Inequalities on other fronts cannot be left alone: they will also have to be taken up and removed in other spheres of property or wealth. The Estate Duty Act which comes into force on the 15th of October is the first step in this direction. It has to be followed up by other similar steps for fostering economic equality and pulling down the existing wall between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

While fixing land ceilings, a few points may be borne in mind. Special concessions may be granted for plots of land which are cultivated on a co-operative basis. In order to save the joint-family system from disintegration, ceilings for land vested in such joint-families may be, say, three times higher than those for individual families. As regards compensation for the land made available after the fixation of ceilings, payment may be spread over a period of 20 or 30 years through a Land Commission. Moreover, only the management of land over and above the ceilings may be taken over by the State without necessarily raising the question of compensation. As suggested by the Planning Commission, the State may lease out such plots of lands to tenants according to specific contracts and the cultivators may be asked to pay annual rents to the land-owners through an agency of the Government. According to this arrangement, it will be possible to redistribute lakhs of acres of land to the rural labourers without the need for payment of compensation.

Acharya Vinoba Bhave's *Bhoodan Yajna* has been extremely helpful in creating a proper atmosphere for the enactment of suitable legislation for effecting land reforms in the country. In fact, the minds of the people are now fully ripe not only for a ceiling but also a 'floor' for the large farms. Vinobaji is of the view that mere fixation of ceilings will not be very useful for procuring enough land for redistribution among the landless peasantry. He holds that the State should now fix 'floors' for big farms. For example, the State should make available, say, 5 acres of land to each family which is prepared to cultivate land through its own labour. The question of a ceiling may be considered only if there is surplus land available after the redistribution of land among all the cultivating families. All this meant that the country is now prepared for far-reaching land reforms and any attempt to delay such legislation will be very harmful to the cause of social and economic progress in India.

(Adapted from *The A.I.C.C. Economic Review*, Oct. 15, '53)

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SUBSTANCE OF LINGUISTIC PROVINCES DEMAND

(*By Maganbhai P. Desai*)

The demand for the formation of linguistic provinces has recently grown increasingly insistent and may soon become an irrational clamour. It is high time that we got it clear in our minds what it is exactly that we want in this matter. Else there is reason for the fear that in our zeal for an otherwise admirable objective, we may lose our bearings and drift away into directions that we least expected. For the forces of pride and prejudice which the controversy round this issue is fast unleashing, are a growing danger to the unity of India.

There are in India several major languages, each of which is spoken by lakhs and crores of people. It is therefore natural as also desirable that the administration, including the administration of justice and education in a particular area, should be carried on in the language of the area concerned. This alone will enable the mass of our people to have the real taste of Swaraj and create the necessary atmosphere for their intellectual and civic development. In fact Swaraj loses much of its meaning if this is not done.

This was the simple truth which came to be formulated in the shape of the demand for the refashioning of India's map on the basis of linguistic areas. However the need behind the demand was as stated above. And that need remains as true today when we have attained Swaraj as it was in the past. That is why the people continue to cry for it.

The Congress appreciated this need and organized its work on that basis from as early as 1920-21. This arrangement suited the convenience of the people and was greatly instrumental in creating and educating public opinion in favour of this idea. Indeed its hold on the mind of the people soon became firmly established. Not only that, to some who were too intensely attached to it it almost acquired the virtue of a fetish.

But the formation of provinces on a linguistic basis in the Constitution of the Congress did not mean constituting the entire area in which a particular language is spoken into one single separate State. It was not based on the slogan — 'One language — one State'. It is very necessary today to get this fact clear in our minds. For example, the Congress recognized several provinces, such as Bihar, U. P., Delhi, Punjab etc. in the large Hindi-speaking area in the North. In the same way, the Marathi-speaking area comprised Maharashtra, Vidarbha, and Central Provinces (Marathi). On the other hand, the C. P. which were one administrative unit, comprised of these Congress provinces — Mahakoshal, Vidarbha, C. P. (Marathi). The Bombay City constituted one separate province by itself; and there were three other Congress provinces in the Bombay Province. Congress Gujarat included Kutch and Saurashtra. This shows, though the Congress provinces were said to be based on language, it did not mean that the entire area of a language was to be brought under one administrative unit and constituted into a separate province. The essence of the principle in this regard was, as indicated above, the adoption and use of the language of the common people for all work, administrative, educational, judicial and otherwise.

To this end, in some cases, as in the then Central Provinces, where it was felt necessary to demarcate an existing province linguistically, it did so. But in others where the said purpose could be achieved without any formal division, it did not do so, though it followed the principle in practice. The Congress did not countenance the view, which some are wrongly advocating today, that the entire area of a language should be brought within a separate administrative unit.

This latter view is a distortion of the original principle and stems from the wrongly directed hopes and fancies brought about by the advent of Swaraj. They represent pernicious forces which are producing conflict and rivalry and consequent bitterness among the different provinces of our nation. If only the provinces, as they exist at present, would put the essence of the demand into practice, there would be no cause left for the actual separation of the provinces, if the provincial limit is otherwise tenable economically, administratively etc. For example, there are three different languages in the Bombay Province. If the administration, education and other work in each language-area were carried out in that particular language, the demand would have been met. But there are difficulties in the way. Some even talk of retaining English. There are others who advocate the narrow-minded view that the Uttar Pradesh Hindi should be followed throughout the land. The Universities and the Governments are not yet able to take a clear and definite decision regarding the language to be adopted as the medium of instruction. All this creates confusion. The immediate need therefore is to restore the major languages to their rightful place in every field — in administration, education and courts — within their respective areas. While on the one hand this will give effect to the substance of the principle of linguistic provinces, on the other, it will clarify the position regarding the redivision of the country into provincial units from

the economic, geographical and other relevant points of view.

14-10-'53

(From the original in Gujarati)

BHOODAN WORK IN PARDI

(*By Maganbhai P. Desai*)

Acharya Kripalaniji has replied to my article (*Harijan*, 10-10-'53) by a letter to the Editor, the contents of which are already out in the Press by now. After my request to him in that article was published, the Gujarat Bhoodan Committee met at Sabarmati and also requested the P. S. Party to help restore the peaceful atmosphere necessary for successful Bhoodan work, by calling off the movement and to use its forces for Bhoodan work. The Committee in its resolution drew the attention of the people that for solving the land problem the true and proper form of Satyagraha action was only the Bhoodan way shown by Shri Vinoba ; and the Committee called upon the members of the local P. S. Party to rejoin their hands in its work of collecting land from Pardi. It is heartening to learn that the Committee is immediately sending its workers to Pardi area again, where their work had to be suspended on account of the Khed-Satyagraha atmosphere. Godspeed to its efforts. Let us hope it succeeds in restoring amicable relations between all classes of the people in Pardi taluka and securing enough land for the landless.

Acharyaji in his reply to my request touches the two points raised by me: viz., that "the leaders of the Pardi Satyagraha should call it off ; ....questions of prestige should no way hamper the P. S. P. to act in this manner." It is unfortunate that he could not see his way to getting it done by the local P. S. P., if that was the proper authority for it.

The second point was that "the question of inquiry is such that the P. S. P., if it so wishes, can take it up on its own and report its conclusions both to the public and the Government." And I had added that "if it is to be undertaken at all, the terms of reference for it must be clearly defined."

He has replied to both these counts in the following terms :

Regarding the first he says: "You have asked me to order suspension of the Satyagraha for negotiations to be initiated. You perhaps do not know the functioning of democratic parties or you would not have made the suggestion. With whom are the negotiations to be conducted? The principal party is not myself but Shri Ashok Mehta and his colleagues in the local branch, under whose leadership the Satyagraha was started. So far as I know Shri Mehta is in constant correspondence with Morarjibhai and as is usual with him he is constantly searching for 'areas of agreement'. Let Shri Morarjibhai do likewise and not as at present search areas of disagreement, and the dispute will be amicably settled. Let Shri Mehta be invited as a free man for talks and I am sure he will himself advise his co-workers and the Kisans to suspend the present Satyagraha, and help in finding a solution."

And for the latter he writes: "It is really strange that you should ask the P. S. P. to appoint its own committee of enquiry. It evidently has not occurred to you that its local branch must have done this before approaching the authorities or starting Satyagraha. You want the inquiry to be 'scientific and impartial'. Any inquiry to be this must have on it the representatives of all the parties to the dispute. Such a committee can be appointed only by the Government in consultation with the parties concerned, namely representatives of the Kisans, the zamindars and some public men known for their impartiality."

I learn from papers that the P. S. P. and the Kisan Panchayat which launched the Khed-Satyagraha have withdrawn it and a "starve-the-landlord" campaign, as it is styled, will take its place. Under the circumstances my first suggestion does not need any further discussion. I only wish the withdrawal had better been more graceful and categorical, so that the misguided Adiwasis might be saved from further troubles.

Regarding the other point, viz. the inquiry into the problem, I repeat my suggestion that for a committee to be useful and effective, scientific and impartial, it need not necessarily be a Government committee. Did not the Congress have, for example, the Jalianwala Bag Inquiry, the Public Debt Inquiry and many others appointed by it alone? Did not Gandhiji have his own inquiry in the Champaran, which compelled the Bihar Government to take up the question? Was it not undertaken in the teeth of the opposition from Government as also the landlords?

Regarding the matter of inquiry Acharyaji further says, the local branch of the P. S. P. "must have done it before approaching the authorities or starting Satyagraha." I beg to submit that, so far as the results of my inquiry about this go, there was no such thing done and, if at all there was one of a sort, no formal report, so far as I know, was placed before the public. This may be done even now. What is more relevant and necessary is to know the precise terms and clear objects of reference for such an inquiry. I hope the P. S. P. will demur from creating more bad blood between the landlords and the Adiwasis by its new campaign of 'starving the landlord', and go into these matters of inquiry themselves and put its results before the public and the Government. However, it is good so far as the overt action of breaking the law by trespass on grass lands is stopped now. Let us hope the P. S. P. workers will heed to the resolution of the Gujarat Bhoodan Samiti and begin to co-operate

with it in its work in Pardi now. In that case, I hope, a situation will be created whereby Government should take a liberal view of the whole episode and consider the cases of those, chiefly the misguided Adiwasis, who had to be prosecuted for the offences persuant to the Khed-Satyagraha, so that they can attend to their work awaiting them in the fields at this part of the year.

26-10-'53

POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

(*By Prof. M. R. Agarwal*)

Leading men in the country recognize that at the present time poverty and unemployment are our biggest national problems. If poverty is removed many of our problems shall vanish automatically and many others shall be considerably eased. In this article we propose to give these problems a close scientific study and arrive at some obvious conclusions.

An unemployed person is one who has no money to satisfy his needs and wants a job to get that money. But a person who has enough money to satisfy his needs, although he may be doing no work, is not called unemployed. The primary thing, therefore, is the satisfaction of human needs and poverty is caused by non-satisfaction of these needs. Money is only a medium for the satisfaction of the same.

Human needs are satisfied by food, clothing and shelter — by wheat, rice, milk, iron, lime etc. Money is not used as food, clothing or as shelter, but comes in the picture only as a medium to exchange goods produced by different persons.

The fundamental basis of the modern industrial system is a progressive increase of material human wants; and the capitalists continue to cater for them and add to their own wealth and power. Man toils and works for the satisfaction of his wants, but the industrial system works not for their satisfaction but for the creation of wants. Thus the industrial system works against the interest of the people, which is reflected in practically every sphere of our life today and is largely responsible for the growing poverty and unemployment.

Anything that creates wants creates poverty and anything which removes wants removes poverty. Food is necessary for the body and a person who cannot afford to buy food is a poor man. But if man could live without food, the non-availability of food will no more cause poverty.

We shall illustrate this very important principle by comparing the economic effects of using some of the products of the modern industrial system with some natural products.

Man toils for the satisfaction of his wants; but these days money is spent, but wants are not satisfied but are further increased. For example, a man spends Rs 15,000/ to buy a car, an important product of the modern age. The car satisfies none of his *basic* needs but increases his needs further. He now needs tyres, tubes, petrol and oil, a driver, cleaner and garage etc. After some time the repair bills begin coming and mounting up. If he has no money for petrol he feels that he is very poor. A man having no car does not need money for petrol. We do not mean that a car is a useless thing, but certainly mean that it is not only useless but a terrible burden for a large majority of people who own it.

The cigarette and tea are two more important products of the modern age. Smoking and tea drinking these days are signs of respectability. But tea and tobacco satisfy no human needs; they on the other hand cause serious damage to the body. Thus the people spend money on these and then more money to cure the diseases caused by them.

Now we study the economic effects of using two natural products, say milk and honey which have been considered the basis of human prosperity from many ages. Milk and milk products are produced by cows and buffaloes. Milk is a perfectly balanced food and man can live in perfect health on milk alone. Its absence in our diet is largely responsible for all the T. B., blindness, tooth decay and other diseases that we suffer from. Some benefits of milk, its products and the cow are:

1. These products keep the digestive organs in perfect health, the body can extract all the nourishment from the food we eat. Therefore less quantity of food is needed.

2. No money is spent to cure sickness and disease because the body remains in perfect health.

3. The cow eats grass and oil-cake and converts these to milk and ghee. Cow-dung is a valuable manure and the present food shortage is the direct result of the scarcity of this manure. The average yield of wheat is 12 maunds per acre these days, which can be easily doubled with the help of cow-dung.

4. The cow gives bullocks that plough the land, draw water from the wells and carry loads.

5. The cow has to be bought only once and this gives birth to more cows. Compared to this a car has to be bought every four or five years, otherwise the repair bills go very high.

6. When the animal dies the hide is used to make shoes and the bones give valuable manure.

Honey is nature's most perfect sweet and Indians have regarded it as nectar from many ages. Its food value and benefits to health are well known throughout the world.

The bees that produce honey serve another valuable purpose — they act as pollinators or carrying agents of fertilizing elements from one flower to another. It is a scientific fact that bee

pollinates 90 per cent of the farm and fruit crops of the world. It is extremely unfortunate that an agricultural country like India should have an alarming scarcity of these honey bees.

Canada produces 36 million pounds of honey per year, but in India crores of rupees worth of honey dries up in sun and wind because there are no bee-keepers to collect the same and millions of bee colonies are destroyed by unscientific methods of collection. Bee-keeping figures in the class of preferential industries in foreign lands, not because of honey and bee-wax alone, although both are important, but because of the indispensable service performed by bees in pollinating the greatly increased production. The benefits from bee-keeping to agricultural and fruit industries are at least 15 times those accruing in the shape of honey. It is simple arithmetic that more than half the harvest on the Indian fields is lost to us because there are no bees to pollinate the flowers.

The above shows that milk, milk products, honey, the cow and the honey-bees satisfy a very large number of our basic needs and these fight poverty on many fronts. We are becoming poor day by day because we have discarded these vital agents that bring prosperity, and have begun using the products of the modern industrial system that create poverty.

Banaras Hindu University,
25-9-'53

PROHIBITION IN U. S. A.

There was a rising tide of public sentiment against everything connected with the liquor traffic in many lands that he had visited and this was also true in his own country, America, stated Mr A. V. Olson, Vice-President of the International Temperance Association, broadcasting from the Bombay station of All India Radio, on August 23. Despite blatant pronouncements of failure over the programme of Prohibition in the United States a few years ago, he said, liquor interests of America had now realized that the tide was turning against them.

"Dry Forces" Take the Initiative

Mr Olson said: "An indication of this can be seen in the number of bills being introduced in the Legislative Assemblies of the United States. During the past year, approximately 1,654 bills were introduced, calling for restrictions, controls and bans on the sale, serving, and consumption of alcoholic beverages. The dry forces of the country were taking the initiative and putting the liquor interests on the defensive. Reports from various State capitals disclose that bills have been introduced in three State Legislatures calling for State-wide Prohibition. These States are Georgia, Idaho and North Carolina. In fact, Governor Umstead of North Carolina, in his inaugural message, recommended a State-wide referendum on whether or not alcoholic beverages should be allowed or permitted to be sold in Northern Carolina.

No Liquor Advertisements

"From one large city in the southern part of America comes word that there is a steady increase in the number of newspapers and magazines that refuse to accept liquor advertising. The liquor interests are keenly aware of this fact."

India's Noble Stand

The Temperance Movement leader said that the people of India were more temperance-conscious than the people of many other lands, and added, "Government officials and social workers of this mighty Republic are to be complimented on the noble stand they have taken in favour of Prohibition."

Mr Olson said that he was pleased to note that the Constitution of India called for gradual introduction of Prohibition. "India", he added, "with its deep religious convictions, its cultural and philosophical background and its idealistic but realistic outlook, may yet set the pace and lead the world in so far as the banning of all alcoholic beverages is concerned."

All through the Middle East countries, Mr Olson said, alcoholic beverages were looked upon as a curse and a necessary evil when dealing with Westerners. Outstanding Moslems in general did not drink. Iran had recently declared national Prohibition. The king of Saudi Arabia had banned alcoholic beverages from his land.

U. S. Prohibition Not a Failure

"A very common remark", Mr Olson said, "that I hear as I travel about from country to country is that Prohibition was a failure in America. I do not admit this to be the truth. Let me present a few facts that will speak for themselves. These facts as they relate to the Prohibition programme in America have a message for the public of India today.

False Argument

"If wet advocates in this country think that they will solve the problem of bootlegging and the sale of illicit liquor by repealing Prohibition, they will have a sad awakening if and when Prohibition should ever be voted out. We have discovered this fact in the United States. During our own Prohibition days, we were assured by the repealists that all of the ills besetting our fair land would vanish if only Prohibition were repealed. All of the crime and lawlessness attached to bootlegging and sale of illicit liquor would be put to an end."

Increased Illicit Distillation

Prohibition had gone but had bootleggers and the sale of illicit liquor disappeared in America, Mr Olson asked, and added, "Some experts have estimated that for every legal distillery in America today there are a hundred illicit stills and that these bootlegging places are turning out illicit liquor at the rate of 18,000,000 gallons per year. What is more, instead of eliminating bootleggers, these enemies of respectable society are being arrested at the rate of about a thousand a month.

"If you want to get rid of bootleggers and illicit liquor, repealing Prohibition is not the way to do it. The United States has learned from experience that such a step only causes bootlegging to flourish.

"My country is learning — or should have learned — some other very valuable lessons regarding the use of alcoholic beverages. Among these is the fact that alcohol is a waster of human and material resources.

"In 1951, the people of the United States spent $ 9,150,000,000 for alcoholic beverages. This was more than $ 1,000,000 an hour for every hour of the year."

Concluding, Mr Olson said that he had presented a few facts and figures from the United States and her dealings with the liquor problem in order to hearten the people of India in their fight against alcoholic beverages. "You are carrying forward," he said, "almost commendable struggle. Right is on your side. In the end you are sure to win!"

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THE MIDDLE CLASS

(*By Maganbhai P. Desai*)

A correspondent from Nagpur writes:

"Please permit me to congratulate you on your editorial entitled "Savings and Social Security". (Vide *Harijan*, 29-8-'53). It is useful, since it is thought-provoking.

"At the same time, one is constrained to remark that the premises mentioned by you about the condition of the middle classes and the role which that class plays in national economy, do not hold good today. As a matter of fact, the enormous rise in the cost of living has evaporated their savings and brought this class on the verge of starvation. Under the impact of economic forces, the old family system is fast disintegrating and it is difficult to find today a middle class family which can balance its budget in the face of increasing numbers and diminishing returns.

"There is another aspect of the social phenomenon which is squeezing the middle class, not only in India but in U.K. and other countries. With the march of science, mechanization and gradual replacement of man by machine, the avenues of employment for this class are shrinking every day. Very little middle class will be left in the next 10 years, for India has decided to march along with other nations in the direction of industrialization.

"In my view, the root cause of the trouble with the middle classes is that they fail to recognize that they really belong to the lower social strata. Their habits, tastes and mode of living are those of the richer classes, while their incomes are those of the working class level, many times even lower. The proletariat can at least take to begging as a profession, but middle class people can't do even that. The result is moral degradation and many times suicide. The sooner this class wholly merges itself with the proletariat class, the better for all."

It is perhaps true, as the correspondent says, that the middle class is hard hit by higher prices and consequent general rise in the cost of living at present. But the rise affects all, including the poor working classes. What might make it peculiarly hard for the middle classes is that, comparatively to the working classes, the former classes do not generally have all adult members of the family working in a gainful way; only one or two persons of a middle class family work, the remaining depending on them.

And as the correspondent says, these classes live, or love to live, in the manner of the upper ones. This is another difficulty for them.

The remedy for both lies essentially with those classes themselves. Shri Rajaji a few months back had solemnly advised this class that it should take to homecrafts. It is also necessary that it should adopt simplicity of life. Thrift also is one of our great middle class virtues, which is unhappily fading away from our urbanized economy. And I would add, not only simplicity but some bearable austerity also should be the order of the day, specially for the middle class. Do we not spend away good money, in these hard days, after wasteful social snobbery and idle luxury in imitation of the leisured upper classes? I am told cinema, cosmetics, fashions in dress, etc. make disastrous claims on the hard earnings of the middle classes. Why should it be so? And who but themselves stand to be blamed then?

The correspondent at the end wishes, it seems almost in despair, that the middle classes should merge in the proletariat classes. My suggestion of thrift, austerity and simplicity in life added by home industries is the answer to this wish of his. It is not possible to abolish the class as such, because it is a part and a necessary part of the social order as it obtains at present. What is wrong is that today this class has its face towards the upper rich class and its back at the poor toiling masses. This brings in, as I remarked above, avoidable misery to it. While it imitates and flatters the former, it kicks and ignores the latter. This brings about almost a class-war psychology among us today. There is another thing also: such a mood drives away all the revolutionary fervour from the class. In the days before 1947, this class looked to the good of the poor and had its back towards the rich. They have made a right turn at present and the country has lost in bargain the fervour that made it possible for us as a nation to do the great venture of achieving freedom. The loss costs us heavily at present. We cannot move as speedily as before in our march to true Swaraj or Rama Raj. This is a national calamity greater than anything else after independence.

I call upon the correspondent and therethrough all who think for the middle classes to ponder over the few remarks I have noted above.

13-10-'53

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